DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 368 823 UD 029 810

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TITLE Issues of Diversity and Conflict Resolution.
PUB DATE [92]
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Techniques; College Faculty; *Conflict Resolution; *Cultural Differences; *Experiential Learning; Higher Education; High Schools; Models; Role Playing; Simulation; Teacher Education; *Training; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS *Diversity (Student)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the training model described in this paper is to provide proactive and intervention strategies for managing classroom conflict. The impetus for the creation of this model came from a workshop collaboratively developed by high school students, teachers, and university faculty. The training model is designed for both prospective and practicing teachers and utilizes a variety of approaches including simulations and role play. The model is based on the assumptions of experiential learning. The steps of this model are outlined and facilitators are provided information for processing. (Contains 12 references.) (Author)

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# ISSUES OF DIVERSITY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Abstract

The purpose of the training model described in this paper is to provide proactive and intervention strategies for managing classroom conflict. The impetus for the creation of this model came from a workshop collaboratively developed by high school students, teachers, and university faculty. The training model is designed for both prospective and practicing teachers and utilizes a variety of approaches including simulations and role play. The model is based on the assumptions of experiential learning. The steps of this model are outlined and facilitators are provided information for processing.

## ISSUES OF DIVERSITY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

As education enters the 21st Century, nearly one-third of all public school students will be students of color. A closer look at the student body reveals a student profile that is increasingly diverse, poor, and mobile.

The sociological mix of the classroom is a setting ripe for misunderstandings. In the confines of a classroom, students are placed with others who are different and with whom they may not have chosen to associate. This coming together of different races, religions, and cultures representing varying levels of power and privilege may provoke conflict and acts of aggression.

Often teachers and students enter the classroom ill-prepared to address the issues of diversity. Avery & Walker (1993) report that most teachers feel unprepared to deal with diverse populations. Grant (1989) claims that few teacher education programs include information about diverse cultures and less still about teaching strategies and techniques to enhance the success and self-confidence of ALL students. These assertions are supported in reports by practicing teachers and national studies of teacher education programs (Grant & Secada, 1990; Holmes Group, 1986).

Today, more than ever before, classrooms are multiracial, multicultural, and multiethnic. With the increasing percentages of minority

children in the classrooms, there is a greater emphasis on dealing with issues of diversity.

Teachers in the schools and students enrolled in teacher preparation programs do not reflect the cultural diversity of the K-12 student body (Garcia & Pugh, 1992). Many practicing and prospective teachers have lived in communities where diversity has not been a characteristic of their personal experience. They have attended schools where cultural diversity was never addressed, and do not perceive diversity as a significant variable in their preparation to teach. The majority of college faculty members in teacher education programs attended high school and college in the fifties and sixties when few courses addressing issues of diversity were in existence (Baker, 1977).

There is a need to prepare prospective and practicing teachers for the diversity which exists in the classroom. Lichter (1989) projected that by the year 2000, only 55.9% of the U.S. population will be white, in contrast to 75.5% in 1980. Asian and Pacific Islander student populations are projected to increase by 70%, Hispanic by 54% and African-American by 13%. The College Board and Western Interstate Commission of Higher Education 1991 forecast that diverse student populations in the United States would increase dramatically by 1994 has proven to be right on target especially in Florida,

Texas, California and New York, where this wave of the future has already washed ashore (Smith, 1992).

Issues of diversity have consistently been addressed in calls for school reform. However, there is evidence that past efforts at school reform have failed at least in part because teachers were denied sufficient authentic input (Liberman, 1990). Regarding teacher education, the same criticism has been voiced. Irvin (1990) stated emphatically that the efficient and effective training of both prospective and practicing teachers must be a joint effort between public schools and universities. Based on past experience, there is no denying that school reform must be a collaborative effort in which the teachers are given a voice. However, we suggest that another voice that needs to be heard is that of the students. Including students in efforts of change was validated in an article by Lugg & Boyd (1993) who took the position that systematic school reform involves "internal linkages" to increase collegial interaction within the schools.

## Training Model

### Background

The background for the material used to create the training model described in this paper was generated from a workshop involving high school students and teachers and college of education faculty. Concerns about

conflicts that had arisen as a result of the diverse nature of the student population was the motivation for the workshop. The high school serves a student population representing over 100 different native countries and 43 different languages and dialects.

During the planning phase of the workshop the teachers suggested a collaborative format. The students and teachers submitted descriptions of situations in which they had personally experienced conflict related to the diverse make-up of the school. The high school drama students were asked to enact these situations which depicted issues of conflict such as misinterpretation of religious rites and rituals, cross-cultural communication, language barriers, lack of cultural awareness, student-teacher misunderstandings, and learning style variations. The enactments were videotaped and used as the basis for the training model described in this paper.

**The Model**

The underlying tenets of the model, titled You're In America Now, are based on experiential learning principles and suggest proactive management and preventive measures while offering a process of intervention. When diversity in the classroom is viewed as an on-going opportunity to provide learning for the class or group, it is rich beyond belief.

This approach of experiential learning which helps students learn from each other and embrace differences is based on three underlying assumptions.

1. People learn from their experience. The question here is not if, but what they will learn.
2. The outcome of the learning will depend on the self-talk messages involved and the way they are processed.
3. The knowledge that is "discovered" by processing personal experiences has more meaning and will more likely result in change in behavior.

**Purpose**

The purpose of the training model is to provide appropriate experiences for practicing or perspective teachers who are either unfamiliar or uncomfortable with diversity. Through the use of simulation and role play the participants are given the opportunity to develop understandings and to generate prevention and intervention strategies related to conflicts which may arise in the classroom. The videos provide the reality but the safety of distance that allows the participants to reflect honestly their own perception and interpretation and work toward understanding.

**Steps of the Model**

To facilitate the use of the videos, a trainer's guide was developed employing a carefully sequenced format. The suggested format involves the following procedure.

**Observation**: Without prior discussion, show the vignette.

**Description**: Encourage participants to describe, as objectively as possible, what they have just seen. The facilitator is to stress that they avoid the use of judgment and interpretation.

**Explanation/Interpretation**: Ask participants to explain and interpret the interactions of the characters on the video. The purpose of this stage is to help participants become aware of their feelings and reactions.

**Identification of the Issues**: Ask the participants to develop a list of the underlying issues portrayed in the scenes.

**Intervention**: Have participants brainstorm possible intervention strategies for each identified issue. Consideration should be given to the short-term and long-term consequences of each suggested intervention strategy. At this point, the participants are asked to role play the identified strategies.

**Prevention**: As above, for each identified issue ask the participants to brainstorm possible prevention strategies and possible consequences. Encourage participants to role play each of the suggested strategies.

## Conclusions

The facilitation of effective learning will, in part, depend on teachers' understanding and utilizing effective strategies for intervention and prevention of conflict as related to issues of diversity. In the past, many of our attempts to teach management of conflict in the classroom have been prescriptive. Based on experience this approach has not proven to be effective.

By encouraging and facilitating, instead of prescribing, the model allows practicing and prospective teachers to recognize their strengths and empowers them to initiate change. They are encouraged to view classroom interactions as opportunities to learn rather than simply as disruptions. Utilizing video taped scenes gives this training model the safety of distance combined with "real life" material for discussion and role play. It is intended that the assumptions of experiential learning in which any interaction or occurrence is viewed as an opportunity or challenge will be absorbed by the participants and then replayed in their own experiences in the classroom.

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